

how can we meet the big challenges and seize the big opportunities out there, Bill Nelson will be just fine.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:04 p.m. in the Audubon Ballroom at the Hyatt Regency

Westshore. In his remarks, he referred to Bill Nelson, Democratic candidate for U.S. Senate in Florida, and his wife, Grace; Mayor Dick A. Greco of Tampa; former Representative Sam M. Gibbons; Ben Hill Griffin III, Chris Hoyer, and Jim Wilkes, luncheon cohosts; and Republican Presidential candidate Gov. George W. Bush of Texas.

Interview With Kelly Ring of WTVT Television in Tampa July 31, 2000

Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit

Ms. Ring. First of all, let's talk about why you came, and that's Medicare. And you know—I mean, this is something that's been important to you for a long time—getting Medicare, part of the prescription drug program included in Medicare. Talk about why that is so important to have that.

The President. Well, Medicare is a program that's 35 years old, and it's been a godsend for 35 years for a lot of our seniors. But when it was established, most of medicine was about doctors and hospitals and very little about prescription drugs. Now, the average 65-year-old has a life expectancy of 82 or 83 years, the highest in the world for seniors. And more and more, people need these drugs to stay alive and also to stay healthy.

Over and above that, America has about 5 million people on disability who are eligible for Medicare, and they need the medicine even more. So what we have been saying is, "Look, we've got this surplus. We have the money. We should add a voluntary prescription drug benefit to Medicare, because we have, all over America, seniors who are choosing every week between food and medicine because they can't pay their medical bills and because there is no other viable way to give them the medicine they need."

So I proposed this program, and I told the American people how we can add a prescription drug benefit to Medicare, still have a family tax cut, still invest in education, and keep paying us out of debt. I think that it is so critical to provide for the elderly and disabled in America.

Ms. Ring. Do you think it will happen before you leave office?

The President. I just don't know. I think the problem is the Republicans in the Congress believe that the program might be too expensive, although it's not nearly as expensive as their combined tax cuts, and they want—they also want a private insurance plan. But the bill they passed is just like one that got passed in Nevada, and not a single insurance company would offer the drug coverage because they knew they couldn't offer it at an affordable price. So the plan they passed is unworkable.

Now, what's really going on here is that the pharmaceutical companies that make the drugs, they have reservations about it because they're afraid that if you put 39 million seniors, including 2.7 million seniors in Florida and 5 million disabled people, if you look at all of them and a significant percentage of them get in one program, that the people buying drugs for that one program will have too much marketing power, and they'll get the drugs for too cheap.

Because what happens is, our pharmaceutical companies charge Americans more for drugs to cover all the research costs in America. Then they can sell them much, much cheaper in Canada or Mexico. You've seen all these press stories about people going there.

Now, I just think that's not a very good reason to deprive senior citizens of medicine, and I don't think it's a partisan issue outside Washington. I think out here in Tampa or in Arkansas or New York or California, nobody asks you what party you're in when you go to the drugstore to buy medicine. In Washington, it's become part of an issue because the drug companies are against providing prescription drug coverage for Medicare. It doesn't sound reasonable, but it's true.

Florida and the 2000 Presidential Election

Ms. Ring. Let's talk about the importance of Florida for this Presidential election. I know that you know how important Florida is. We have a Republican Governor—popular. His brother is running, but tell me what the Democrats are going to do to win Florida. Do you think they can?

The President. Well, absolutely. For one thing, I think we've worked very hard here for 8 years. We brought the Southern Command to Miami. We brought the Summit of the Americas to Florida. We worked on the plan to save the Florida Everglades. We have worked on trade policy. Our trade policy has helped a lot of Florida economic sectors.

I was just here with Congressman Davis meeting with people from the Tampa area who would benefit greatly from the opening of trade to China. So I think we've got a strong record to run on. If you look at Tampa when I became President, unemployment here was 7.1 percent. Now it's 2.7 percent. So, first we're going to run on our record. It's been good for America and good for Florida, and Al Gore will continue that economic policy, and I think that's important.

Then, the second thing I think is just what we have to do is get out the differences on the issues. For example, Senator Graham has a bill of his own to provide prescription drugs for seniors that is a little different from ours but essentially in the same ballpark. And I know how much credibility he has with the Florida voters. So we can talk about Medicare, and we can talk about education, and we can talk about paying the debt off.

I think when you see the Vice President and his running mate and Bill Nelson and all of these other Democrats out there just having a conversation with the people, we don't have to have a mean election this year. This year the economy is in great shape. The country is doing well, and we ought to have an old-fashioned citizenship lesson in this election. We ought to say, "Here are the differences. You choose."

Differing Visions of the Future

Ms. Ring. And it's like you said in the speech a little while ago, you're talking about the differences. The Democrats are, but the Republicans aren't. Elaborate a little bit on that.

The President. Well, I think it's because they know that there is a tendency in the country to give the other crowd a chance after they've been out a while, and they know that Governor Bush is an immensely charming, attractive man, and Mr. Cheney, Congressman Cheney, is a very nice man and has had Washington experience.

So what they want to do is to seem safe and reliable and compassionate and inclusive. So they're not going to be up there saying, "Vote for us. Our favorite Supreme Court judges are Justice Thomas and Justice Scalia, and we're going to repeal *Roe v. Wade*," but that's what's going to happen. But they're not going to say that. They're not going to be up there saying, "Vote for us. We want to weaken air pollution laws on the chemical industry," or, "Vote for us. We want to make sure that we don't have a Medicare prescription drug program that works," or, "Vote for us. We're going to give all your money away in tax cuts, and we'll have higher interest rates and a deficit."

But what I think is important is, they should be able to defend their policies, but what they want to do is to obscure the differences. I see this as I travel from State to State now. They accuse the Democrats of running negative campaigns if they have advertisements pointing out how the Republicans voted. It's like they're almost saying, "We have a right to obscure our record from the people if you want."

What I think the voters need is clarity of difference. There are honest differences between these candidates. Let them state the differences honestly, but don't pretend the differences don't exist, because an election is a choice, and choices have consequences. And the American people should know the choice, know the consequences, and then make up their mind.

And there are real differences on economic policy, on health care policy, on crime policy, on environmental policy, on policies relating to civil rights and individual liberty; profound differences, not just between the Vice President and Governor Bush but between these candidates for Senate, in this case, Bill Nelson and his opponent here—right around the country. And what we should do is to say, "Hey, this country is in great shape now, and we have a unique moment in history to make the most of our prosperity. So we'll bring our ideas; they'll bring theirs. Let's clarify the differences. Let's not say bad things about our opponents. Let's assume everybody is patriotic, loves their family,

loves their country, is honest, and would do what they have said they would do. But let's don't pretend that they didn't say they would do some of the things they said they would do. Let's just clarify the differences, and let the people make their mind up." That's my whole theory of the election.

Hillary Clinton's Senate Campaign

Ms. Ring. Sounds pretty good. But let me ask you: Now that you're in the last few months of your Presidency, your wife is just beginning her own political career.

The President. I'm very proud of her.

Ms. Ring. I know you are so proud of her. But on the other side, politics is mean-spirited. How do you feel about that?

The President. It hurts me. I get more nervous about her than I ever did about me, and everybody that always hated me all those years and were so mean to me, they've all transferred all their anger to her now. It's almost as if they've got one last chance to beat me. And then there are some people who voted for me that think they're mad at her because she's running in New York, and we just bought a home there.

All I can say to them is, it wasn't her idea. The New York Democratic House delegation came to her and asked her to run. And before she said she would do it, she said, "I'm going to go up there and look around, talk to people, and see if I could serve." She spent almost a year doing that, and then finally she decided that she would like to serve if they wanted her to.

So I think if we can get this election again in a position where they just look at who's got the greatest strength, who's got the ability to do more, and which candidate do they agree, I think she'll do fine. I'm really proud of her, though. It's a really brave thing to do.

Ms. Ring. It certainly is. As you said, it makes you very nervous thinking about what she's getting into.

The President. I guess when you're in a campaign, you don't have time to think about it. But I spend a lot more time worrying about her than I ever did worrying about myself when I was out there running. I feel like I just wake up every day wishing I could do something else to help.

President's Future Plans

Ms. Ring. What are you going to do when you leave office? Everybody's talked about all kinds of things, and I know you probably haven't decided yet. I mean, everything—

The President. Well, I'm going to build a library and a public policy center at home in Arkansas. I know I'm going to do that. And I'll be there a couple of days a week. And then I'll probably be with Hillary a couple of days a week in New York. And then, of course, she'll have to work in Washington if this election goes well, and I believe it will. So I'll just decide what to do.

There are a lot of things that I have in mind to do, but I don't think I really should make final decisions until after I leave here. What I want to do is to spend every last waking moment I can doing as much as I can for the people of America. And that's what this job is.

When I lay the job down, then I would like to rest a bit and have a clear head and decide what to do. I'll try to find something to do to be useful for the rest of my life. I think I'll be able to find something to do.

Chelsea Clinton

Ms. Ring. You're so young, so you've got so many opportunities.

You've got to be so proud of your daughter, Chelsea. I mean, we reported last week she's made a decision to take a break and spend time with you—that's wonderful—and to help her mom campaign.

The President. It's wonderful. When your children grow up—I can say, now that I have this experience—you're always mildly surprised when they still want to spend time with you and completely relieved and happy. So you know, she's lived 40 percent of her life in the White House. She's 20, and she was just, when we came here in '92, she was still 12 years old. She was actually—I mean, in '93 she was still 12 years old. She had her 13th birthday in the White House, in February.

So she's been here for 40 percent of her life, and she's got more credits than she needs to graduate from college, and she told me that she was interested in doing three things: She wanted to help her mother some; she wanted to be with me when I would otherwise be alone; and—like, she went up to Camp David with

me and stayed the whole 15 days and kept everybody in a good humor.

She flew to Okinawa with me, and she did a great job. And I think the third thing she wants is just to be in a place that has been her home for nearly half her life, every night she can be. Because she knows when she leaves, it's for good, you know, and she'll never be back, I mean, as a resident. So I think it's a very smart decision for her, and I'm thrilled.

Ms. Ring. Because I'm sure you must be, because here she was just a young girl, and now she's a young woman. It's been so wonderful. I mean, everybody's fallen in love with her. She's just a very special person.

The President. I think she's an unusual young woman, and we're very proud of her and very grateful. And I think it's great. You know, tomorrow she and her mother are going to Long Island together. They'll have a big time. I think it's great.

Middle East Peace Process

Ms. Ring. One more—can I ask about Mid East peace, because I know how important that is? You spent 3 tough weeks. Do you ever foresee a time when there is going to be peace in the region, and is Jerusalem the sticking point there?

The President. The answer to both questions is basically yes. I think—yes, I think there will be peace in the region; yes, Jerusalem is the most difficult issue. They did not agree on everything else, but they're close enough that I think that we can still get an agreement.

Just a few hours ago, before we sat down for this interview, the Barak government, Prime Minister Barak's government in Israel was confirmed in a no confidence vote; that is, they didn't vote him out of office. So I think now, we just have to see if we can get some movement from the Palestinians, as well, and see if we can put this thing together again.

If they want it, they can get it, because they're close enough now. They can get it. And I saw something after we had been there 2 weeks—sort of the body language that the Israelis and the Palestinians, the way they relate to each other. They know each other. They call

each other by their first names. They know they're neighbors, whether they like it or not. They know their future is together, whether they would always want it to be or not. And they know their children are going to have to be partners and hopefully friends; and I think they'll find a way. I do believe that.

I think it's just a question of making sure that we keep pushing them. When you deal with issues this difficult and this painful, it's like going to the dentist without having your gums deadened. You're not going to do it unless somebody herds you on, and you do it.

But the calendar is working against them a little bit, because they have pledged to finish by the 13th of September. And that puts all kind of pressure, especially on the Palestinians. So they've got to keep working right now. They've got to do everything they can to get as much as they can done over the next 6 weeks.

I think they will, and America's role is just to help. They've got to make the decisions and live with them, but we'll do everything we can to help.

Ms. Ring. Will you try to bring them back to Camp David?

The President. I can't say yet. It's too premature to make a decision. What I will try to do is do whatever I can to get the peace process up and going and to bring it to a speedy conclusion. But I do not know, honestly do not know, as we sit here and talk, what would be the most helpful.

Thanks.

Ms. Ring. Thank you very much for doing this.

The President. Okay.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 3:30 p.m. in the Presidential Suite at the Hyatt Regency Westshore for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to Republican Presidential candidate Gov. George W. Bush of Texas and Vice Presidential candidate Dick Cheney; Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel; and Bill Nelson, Democratic candidate for U.S. Senate in Florida. Ms. Ring referred to Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Statement on Debt Reduction

July 31, 2000

When I came into office, the debt had quadrupled since 1980 and was projected to rise even further. As a result of the 1993 and 1997 budget agreements and tough choices every year, we have been able to turn this situation around. Today the Department of the Treasury is announcing that the United States will pay off \$221 billion of debt this year—the largest one-year debt paydown in American history. This will be the third consecutive year of debt reduction, bringing the 3-year total to \$360 billion.

This positive news is further confirmation that we should stay on the path of fiscal discipline

and not endanger the longest economic expansion in history with a series of expensive tax cuts which would spend every single dime of our projected surplus. The Republican tax plan leaves nothing for strengthening Social Security and Medicare, nothing for a real voluntary Medicare prescription drug benefit, and nothing for education. And the Republican plan would take us off the path of paying off the entire national debt by 2012. This is the wrong approach for America.

Remarks at a Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee Reception in Palm Beach, Florida

July 31, 2000

Thank you very much. I am so happy to be here. All of you know I love Florida. A good portion of my wife's family has lived down here for the last 15 years and more. I got my start in Florida twice, once in December of 1991—everyone knows about that—when the Florida straw poll came out with a majority for me against six opponents and got me started, and I'm very grateful for that. But once, maybe only one person in this room remembers, and that was in early 1981 when I had the distinction of being the youngest former Governor in the history of America, when I was defeated in the Reagan landslide of 1980, Bob Graham still invited me to come speak to the Florida Democratic Convention to explain how it was that I got my brains beat out in the hope that others could avoid a similar fate. *[Laughter]* I have never forgotten it, never stopped feeling indebted. And Bob asked me back three more times after that, and I think that had a lot to do with what happened in 1991, so I'm very grateful to him.

I'm grateful that both Bob and Adele and Bill and Grace Nelson have been friends of Hillary's and friends of mine for a very long time now. And Bill and Grace and their children have spent the night in the White House. And

Bill was making fun of me because his daughter used to call Chelsea, and from time to time I, like every father of a teenage daughter, I was the answering service. *[Laughter]* The Presidency doesn't alleviate some responsibilities in life.

We've had a great relationship, all of us, all six of us have now for such a long time, and I'm so honored that Bill is running for the Senate, so grateful.

I want to just—I'll be brief tonight because I know I'm preaching to the saved here. But Florida is very important. We have to win the Senate race, and you have to carry it for the Vice President, and you can. And I believe in 1996, early on election night, when I saw that we had carried Florida, I knew the election was over. And in 2000, early on election night, if the polls show we have carried Florida, the election is over. And I want you to understand that.

I have—Al Gore and I have spent a lot of time in Florida over the last 7½ years. We worked with many of the people here in south Florida to save the Everglades, to bring the Southern Command here from Panama, to bring the Summit of the Americas here, to work to expand trade. We just passed the Caribbean Basin trade bill which will be very good for